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*K. Beddoes (Tm)*

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M E M O R I A L

CONCERNING THE STATE OF THE

BODLEIAN LIBRARY,

AND THE CONDUCT OF THE

P R I N C I P A L L I B R A R I A N.

ADDRESSED TO THE CURATORS OF THAT LIBRARY,

BY THE

C H E M I C A L R E A D E R.



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# M E M O R I A L, &c.

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GENTLEMEN,

**I** Offer no apology for calling your attention to the state of that institution which chiefly distinguishes a seat of learning from other places, and to the conduct and abilities of that public officer, to whom the charge of this institution is committed. Whatever inconveniences may arise from such a step, they will all be personal: they will fall upon the Librarian or upon me; the University must derive more or less advantage from it. For if it should appear that the Librarian's qualifications are such as his station requires, and that they are properly exerted, his merit will become but the more conspicuous for having been questioned; and the public approbation will animate him to still greater diligence in the discharge of his laborious duty. Should any thing wrong be discovered, it will be corrected with care proportioned to the evil consequences that must arise from the prevalence of abuses in a department which the common interest requires, above most others, to be well administered: and then, I presume, the enquiry will not be thought to have arisen from a disposition to disturb the general tranquillity by groundless clamours; but, on the contrary,

trary, that he to whom it shall have been owing, that the University more compleatly enjoys the munificence of their greatest benefactors, may hope for some small share of the praise that is due to them. Considerations of inferior moment could never have impelled me, under several discouragements, to impute blame to a gentleman well respected in private life, and against whom, as I have not received from him either incivility or offence, I can harbour no personal animosity. On this occasion, I cannot but remark, that freedom of enquiry into the state of the University seems to have been too much discountenanced. Had such discussions been encouraged, the close of the eighteenth century had never found us with so many wants, and so patiently acquiescing under them; I mean, such wants as that of an opportunity to acquire a competent knowledge of Natural History, of an institution for instructing the youth of a great commercial State in the principles of commerce and manufactures, and many others which I forbear to mention. This is not the proper place to prosecute an enquiry into such deficiencies, and the means of supplying them, nor am I the proper person; otherwise, I know no disquisition more worthy of a philosopher and a patriot. But my present business is with an institution of still greater importance, since, if it be neglected, or suffered to fall into decay, no other can flourish, nor any literary pursuits be effectually carried on.

It is a complaint of very long standing, among the frequenters of the Bodleian Library, that they cannot derive from it such advantages as might be expected from so ample a repository of books, and that the Librarian has sometimes thrown obstructions in their way. But no regular accusation having at any time been brought forward, I was al-

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ways disposed to consider such complaints and insinuations as the momentary effusions of ill-humour, raised by some trivial disappointment, as easily happens when men are deeply engaged in a favourite pursuit. For I supposed, that the utmost jealousy and vigilance must prevail with regard to an object which involves so much both of the honour and interest of the University; that every impediment would be carefully removed out of the way of industry; and that, if there really existed grievances, they would be exposed, examined, and redressed.

Of late I have had sufficient opportunity of becoming acquainted with the state of the library; and from some experience of public libraries, and some information concerning them, I think it not rash to affirm, that all Europe scarce affords an example of one so little calculated to answer the purposes for which a public library is designed.

This happens partly, I fear, from the fault of the Librarian; partly, because those to whom the care of buying books is entrusted, have not sufficient knowledge or do not take sufficient pains; and partly, because the sum, which is understood to be raised for this express purpose, is not expended.

The state of a library will always bear ample testimony to the care and ability of its keeper. If he be acquainted with his business, and attentive to it, the library will be so disposed that the enquirer may immediately meet with the object of his researches; but if he be ignorant, careless, or sullen, the ardour of investigation will perpetually be damped by disappointment or delay.

It is certain, that our ancestors took every possible precaution to guard against such evils. The statute, intended, though, as it appears, in vain, for the regulation of the office  
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of Librarian, is drawn up with extraordinary circumspection and foresight. It is evident, from every clause, that a library was considered as the most valuable possession that can belong to an University. The qualifications of the Librarian are carefully enumerated ; provision is made that he should have no avocations which may interfere with his attention to his duty ; an oath is exacted from every voter ; directions concerning the arrangement of the books, &c. are given, with such minuteness, that they would appear trivial, if, as the statute well observes, they were not of the utmost importance in forwarding the researches of students : care is even taken to guard against the loss of time which might arise from the disagreement of different clocks ; and the evils which at this moment prevail are so expressly pointed out, that one would almost imagine the statute had been framed immediately after the experience of inconveniences arising from the same mismanagement.

The first clause of the statute (Corp. St. 4to. App. p. 6.) enjoins that the Librarian be not encumbered with a *beneficium curatum (nisi propè adjunctum)*. And in the same paragraph he is required to be at hand every day, or, as it is expressed with greater laxity in the Reliquiæ Bodleianæ, "almost every day."

The present Librarian is known to have lived in open defiance of this regulation. At the time when he became a candidate for the office, he is said to have thought it necessary to resign his living ; though it is evident, that the very same thing which disqualified him for receiving his office, must disqualify him for retaining it.

He likewise serves a curacy at about 11 miles distance from the University, which occupation occasions a regular and constant neglect of his duty. If I had not myself so  
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often experienced the inconveniences arising from his absence, I should have been content to wonder, with others, at the toleration of this open and deliberate violation of the statute. But it unfortunately happens, from the disposition of the Chemical Lectures, that I have scarce any leisure, but on Saturdays and Mondays, to consult such books as may assist me in preparing them. Accordingly, on those days I have frequently resorted to the library, and have been uniformly disappointed, because the Librarian alone could supply me with what I wanted. On expressing my surprise that he should be so often absent, I was told by the Under-librarians that he was gone to his curacy; which, as I learned, from farther enquiry, commonly detains him from Oxford both those days.

If the Curators choose to examine the Under-librarians of the last two or three years, they may satisfy themselves how far the attendance of the Librarian corresponds with the requisition of the statute (*sui copiam in dies singulos exhibendi.*)

By the statute of 1769, it is ordered that the doors of the library shall be opened at eight o'clock, A. M.\* from the Annunciation to Michaelmas; and the Librarian (App. p. 10.) is required to be present at the opening of them, and to remain in the library, *quoniam multis modis expediat, ut ad cunctos certa dierum horarumque notitia perveniat (quando nimirum Bibliothecæ Custodem ibidem offendant).*

But neither is the letter or the spirit of these regulations observed. On Monday, May , I went to the library between

\* It would be much more convenient if the library were open in the afternoon from four to six or seven, during the summer half-year. As three is the hour of dining at almost every college, it may as well be shut from three to four.

nine and ten, A. M. and found it shut. I returned twice the same morning, but without being able to find any Librarian, either principal or subordinate. On the fourth visit I was informed, that the Librarian had left Oxford for a week, which he is not allowed to do without the permission of the Vice-Chancellor, and with it only seven days in a quarter of a year. The library is not opened on Saints' days immediately after the University sermon.

It is, moreover, to be feared, that little attention is paid to the clause (p. 189.) which commands, that every book, whether presented or purchased, should, as soon as it can be bound, be inserted in the catalogue, and placed in the library; *ne quis frustra putet, liberum sibi esse, libros in usum Bibliothecæ coemptos vel donatos (modo ne in catalogum relatos aut in Bibliotheca repositos) mutuò dare aut accipere.*

The following circumstance was related by the late Rector of Lincoln College, to a member of the University who is ready to attest it. The Rector having heard that a fine copy of Captain Cook's last voyage had been presented to the library, was desirous of seeing it before it was placed there. The Librarian lent it him, adding, that "he might keep it as long as he pleased, and the longer the better, for if it was known to be in the library, he should be perpetually plagued with enquiries after it."

This disposition to avoid trouble, has, I am afraid, occasionally betrayed the Librarian into such behaviour, as is rather fitted to repel students than to invite them. By far the greater part of those with whom I have conversed complain of this. The circumstances which mark such impropriety of conduct are so slight and evanescent, that it is difficult to comprehend them in words; but the following fact may serve as an instance of what I mean.



mean. A gentleman, who had as much as possible avoided applications to the Librarian, was obliged to ask him for a book, when he met with this kind reception, "Sir, you give me more trouble than all the rest of the University." If the statutes give the Librarians some discretionary power over the younger part of those who are admitted into the library, they do not, I think, direct it to be exercised in this way.

The Curators best know whether it be true, as I am informed, that many or most of the new books are purchased by the Librarian, a power which the statute (App. p. 10.) permits the Curators to delegate to him; and undoubtedly, if he were, as he ought to be, a man well versed in literary history, he would be the proper person, since none can be supposed to be so well acquainted with the state of the library. But by whomsoever this task is undertaken, it is executed with shameful ignorance or negligence, or both. I am sorry to be obliged to use such harsh and offensive terms. But the truth will not admit of softer, as I think will appear beyond dispute from the following instances.

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No care is taken to continue works published in succession, and of which we already have part. We have the Berlin Memoirs only to the year 1779, although several volumes have been since published, and the neglect has been noted in the list of Libri Desiderati. The same inattention is observable with respect to the Memoirs of the French Society of Medicine, and the Petersburg Transactions.

No other species of neglect is so ruinous to a library. Books are more difficultly procured, as we recede farther from the time of their publication. It will therefore soon happen, that one out of several wanting volumes cannot be



procured; and how much of its value the series loses by being broken, it is needless for me to tell.

Haller's *Elementa Physiologiæ* were purchased in 1784; but an imperfect copy was mistaken for perfect: and as it will be difficult, if not impossible, to procure the three remaining volumes, the mistake will probably cost the University the price of the imperfect copy, as no library ought to be without the work.

This mistake is so gross, that I would not, for the sake of my own credit, mention it to a foreigner, since it must appear incredible to him that we should not know of how many volumes the most useful and popular work of this great author consists.

The other works of Haller are likewise incomplete. I find only three volumes of his *Disp. Anatomicæ*, and only one of his *Bibliotheca Anatomica*: the *Bibliotheca Med. Practicæ* is wanting, though a part of the work. I know not who purchased these copies: but the Librarian certainly had the care of arranging them, which he has most awkwardly done; for either the adjoining books must be removed to make way for seven thick quartos, or else the different volumes of the same work must be placed in remote parts of the library.

Six volumes of De Geer's *Memoirs on Insects* were purchased in 1784, when I believe they consisted of seven volumes; but the seventh, which is the most valuable of all, has not even yet been procured, and, if I recollect right, the library paid for the six volumes the price which I gave for the complete copy.

I can truly say, that I have looked into no series of books, without discovering something amiss. Thus, when I  
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wanted to consult the twenty-ninth volume of Rozier's Journal, I found instead of it a duplicate of the twenty-eighth; which shews, that no care is taken to examine whether the new sets of books are compleat.

As far as I can judge from my own experience, the library pays a much higher price for books than it has occasion to do, if they were bought with more care and skill. Thus Margraaf's Opuscles lately cost me three shillings and six-pence, whereas they cost the University seven shillings. Upon comparing the two copies, I found that they were both of the same edition, and in the same condition, neither being new. I found my copy rated at this price in a bookseller's catalogue. I likewise bought of a bookseller, Baume's Chymie, for fourteen shillings; it cost the library a guinea.

With how little knowledge of their worth books are bought, Sir John Hill's Vegetable System alone may testify, for which one hundred and forty pounds were given. This work, like the rest of this author, is universally acknowledged to be of no use nor authority. Fabricius, the great Entomologist, indignant at his total want of good faith, styles him Joannem Hill, damnandæ memoriæ. It appears from the lists, that his other less expensive works, the refuse of the shops, have been collected with preposterous diligence.

So large a sum would have furnished the library with the expensive and valuable works of Bloch, Jacquin, Pallas, Schreber, Schmiedel, Muller, &c.; any of which would, I think, have been preferable to Regnault's Botanique, which was purchased last year for thirty-seven pounds, and upwards.

It seems injudicious to purchase English translations of French books, such as Savary's Letters, in preference to the

original; no person, who knows how such translations are fabricated, would choose to rely on their authority.

It is difficult to discover for what purpose the library should be encumbered with such a book as Ludwig's German, French, and English Dictionary, in three volumes, folio, 1706-16. All the German classical writers, with scarce a single exception, are of a posterior date, and so also must be the best dictionaries of that language.

*was so.* If I am rightly informed, another German and French Dictionary, printed in 1739, has been taken into the library this year (1787). Has this been done because it was discovered that Ludwig's was useless; or because it was not likely soon to find another purchaser; or because it was the best, in compliance with this injunction of the statute, in emendis (libris) summa diligentia adhibenda; delectus quin etiam auctorum & editionum faciendus? This injunction has a reference to the Librarian, because it is laid down in the clause de Officio & Munere Bibliothecarii. But how can such a choice be made without the ability to institute a comparison? The only tolerable dictionary of German and French was compiled at Manheim within these few years, by combining those of Adelung and the French Academy; there is still a better than that taken into the library, in two very thick volumes, octavo, the last edition of which bears the date of 1783.

The Librarian may possess knowledge more profound and valuable; but I conceive that such errors could not have produced such a waste of the public money, if he had been acquainted with title-pages, editions, and the current opinion concerning the worth of books; a kind of information which is easy to be acquired, and of indispensable necessity in such a station.

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That he does not possess it, is, I think, evident from the preceding facts; and that he does not endeavour to acquire it, may be collected from the following. There are several foreign journals taken into the library, from which some knowledge of foreign literature might be collected; but the Librarian takes no advantage of this opportunity, as the uncut leaves of the journals testify. I hope the Librarian is not destitute of a qualification which the statute requires him to possess, the knowledge of modern languages: for if at that time it was thought necessary that he should be "a linguist," how much more necessary must it appear now, when, in consequence of the great cultivation of modern languages, the custom of writing books in Latin has been so much laid aside?

These journals are brought in single numbers by the post, and therefore cost much more than if they were bought in volumes. Much of the value of journals depends upon their novelty, and therefore an active Librarian would so dispose them that they should be always at hand for perusal. But this is so far from being the case, that I have been for these three months asking for the *Journal de Physique* for September 1786. In March last, full four months after it had arrived, the Librarian told me it was in his room in college. I have also enquired for the several numbers for the present year, long after they had arrived or ought to have arrived, but could never procure them till I threatened to do what I have now done. The Librarian was not in the library, and no one else knew where they were to be found. The University therefore pays for an advantage which either the bookseller's or Librarian's negligence does not suffer its members to enjoy.

The successive volumes of the *Philosophical Transactions*  
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do not appear in the library near so soon as they ought. I know a gentleman who has been seeking in vain for a late volume ever since Lent term; the constant answer to his enquiry was, that it was at the bookbinder's. Volume lxxvi. has now been in my possession for a considerable time, but is not yet in the library; if I had not procured the new volumes from another quarter, this remissness of the Librarian would have put me to great inconvenience.

It would be an endless task to enumerate the books which are wanting in the library: and it is much to be lamented that no system for the purchase of books has been formed. This business seems to be chiefly committed to chance, and the discretion of a bookseller; for I have been well informed, that a bookseller has a discretionary power of supplying us with books. Hence it happens, that we have few or none which do not find their way to England of themselves.

Till a better plan is devised, I beg leave to suggest the following hint. Let the sum to be annually expended, be divided into parts proportional to the number and dearness of the books relating to the different departments of learning: then let the person, who by his public office must be supposed to be best acquainted with the valuable books in each particular department, be desired to give in a list of them.

To write down titles in the book of Libri Desiderati seems an useless labour; for many works of great merit, and peculiarly fit for a library, have been repeatedly pointed out to no purpose, while others of less value have been bought in their stead; of this, a slight inspection of this book will convince any one. Thus, though such works as Brenemann's Historia Pandectarum, Tiraboschi della Letteratura Italiana, Anderson's History of Commerce, have been repeatedly set  
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down, others much less calculated for a public library, whether we consider their intrinsic merit or their bulk, have been preferred. We are destitute of a compleat copy of Locke's works, and I believe also of Addison's; of Swift, I find nothing but his "Polite Conversation." We are equally deficient in many other of our best authors, both sacred and profane. I have heard it said, that many foreign books cannot be procured; but there is no difficulty, when once the proper channels are known. To wait for the most valuable foreign books, till they appear in the shops of our booksellers, is to wait till the rivulet has ceased to flow; but I would myself undertake to procure almost any one of modern date.

No publications seem better entitled to a place in a public library, than those of the numerous learned Societies that are dispersed through Europe. But in the late purchases very little regard seems to have been had to them. Nor has any care been taken to supply us with the authors of a country, who may justly contest the palm of Science and Literature with those of any other nation. It may be said, indeed, that if we consider the small number of readers of German, that the use of books written in that language would be very limited. But in a place of education, I think it is rather to be expected, that the means of making literary acquisitions should be provided, than that persons should come already furnished with them. And who can doubt, but that if the poets, divines, philosophers, and lawyers of Germany were within our reach, we should be tempted to study them, as we are tempted to do other things, by the solicitation of opportunity? We cannot surely be afraid, lest the labour of acquiring the language should be thrown away, unless we can suppose that the  
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powers of Haller, Heyne, Meiners, and Michaelis, desert them, when they write in their mother-tongue.

One thing, at least, is certain. Till our Librarians become more active and intelligent, and till our libraries are better stored with books, English literature will never escape the reproach that is constantly and justly cast upon it abroad; "that our studies are usually satisfied in the works of our own countrymen; that in philosophy, in poetry, in every kind of subject, whether serious or ludicrous, whether sacred or profane, we think perfection with ourselves, and that it is superfluous to search farther." (Hermes, preface, pp. 11 and 12.) This very author would have escaped some ridiculous mistakes, if he had possessed but a little of that spirit of investigation in which he laments that we are so deficient: nor, if it had been more common, would his countrymen have had to blush for this assertion of a bishop and a professor of divinity, that the Germans attack and defend religion by arguments taken from the works of our countrymen.

He who thus throws about his affirmations at hazard, will be much less likely to hit the truth, than an unskilful marksman a flying swallow. But how can such writers, as Jerusalem, Doederlein, Michaelis, Reimarus, Mendelssohn, or Lessing, be searched for new arguments on either side, while our high-priests of learning take no care to introduce their offerings into her temples?

I have made no mention of books which I have either found arranged, but not inserted in the catalogue, or mislaid, or lost, because the want of room may really afford some, though not a sufficient excuse for the present confusion. When the new compartment is added to the library, all, I am told, is to be order and regularity, nor shall I then be

any longer under the necessity of waiting half hours and hours, till a Mr. Curtis is called to supply me with books which the Librarians know not where to find.

Neither have I searched for those facts which I have related: they have fallen, without enquiry, in my way. I think myself therefore entitled to infer, that accident cannot, in so short a time, have brought me acquainted with every thing that is amiss in the library; that the mischief is of much wider extent; and that others must have met with the same disappointment and mortification; which, indeed, I know, from the information of several, to be true. Of the existence of evils, that require careful correction, I have given, I trust, abundant proof. The Curators will either apply an adequate remedy, or the matter will be brought before Convocation, according to the direction of the statute (App. p. 19.); and then all will have an opportunity of declaring how far they have found the Librarian assiduous, intelligent, and ready to promote their studies, or the contrary. One question alone seems to me to require the interposition of that house; Whether the church preferment, which the Librarian holds, and the curacy which he serves, do not of themselves disqualify him for retaining his office, and whether it is not at this moment void?

It has been urged, in his defence, that the emoluments of his office are not a sufficient compensation for the labour and attendance it requires, and that therefore he must seek some other source of profit. This argument, which would equally justify the breach of the most solemn engagements, and all laws human and divine, and which, besides, places the convenience of an individual in competition with the interest of the University, is too frivolous to deserve an answer. Unless the words *propè adjunctum* afford a subterfuge, which

yet they cannot do, if it should appear upon examination that his engagement has caused him to neglect the library, this part of his conduct is wholly without defence.

For the other blameable parts of his conduct my own reflections can suggest but one excuse. Being unacquainted with modern advances in science and improvements of language, he has taken no survey of the extent of a Librarian's duty, and is therefore not himself aware of his own insufficiency. According to this, the most favourable view of the case, there are but two steps which a conscientious man can take; either to resign his office, or to acquire, at whatever labour or inconvenience, that information which is essential to the discharge of his duty.

Another circumstance which has been injurious to the library is, that the money annually raised has not been expended in books. I have heard indeed of an intention to lay it out for the benefit of the library; and if the Curators have, as I suppose they have, for I have not been able to gain exact information, the power of diverting it to this purpose, all remonstrance is in vain. It remains only to be wished, that that, or indeed a greater sum, could be unalienably applied to this purpose alone, and that the expence of fitting up the room might be supplied in some other way, by a voluntary contribution or a tax. An opinion, I know, prevails, that, notwithstanding this deduction, the present revenue will, in a few years, enable us to make up our deficiencies in modern books. But those who risque such an assertion must have a very inadequate notion of the immensity of this deficiency. The Advocates library at Edinburgh, the most useful in Great Britain, has an annual income of £.700; that at Gottingen, of £.1100. Now, as these sums are not found too large for the purchase of books, by what kind of arithmetic



metic can it be made to appear, that a smaller sum, employed to the greatest advantage, will not only keep pace with a larger, in providing books to be published hereafter from time to time, but also such as are already to be found in those libraries ?

I can discover no reason why an English should be inferior to a Scotch or an Hanoverian University, in any respect ; nor why the nation should be without as ample a repository of all kinds of human knowledge. If it happens, it must happen through our own neglect. Is the University unable, from its own funds, to provide books in sufficient number, to bestow upon the Librarian a reward equal to his services, and to form other useful establishments ; why is not application made to Parliament ? Can it be supposed that any guardian would refuse to his ward, any parent to his child, or any Englishman to his country, the greatest of all advantages, the means of rendering education more perfect ?

THOMAS BEDDOES.

Pembroke College,

May 31st.

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